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In the Millbrook, New York, home of Nina Grisco and Leonel Piraino, the living room's throw pillows are made of Marianne fabric by Victoria Hagan Herie; the French hammered-bronze cocktail table is from Nina Grisco's eponymous shop, the cast-antler chair was purchased at auction, and the mirror is by BoBo Intriguing Objects. The wall color is a custom mix derived from Silver Fox by Benjamin Moore. See Resources.





in her fashion

A MIX OF ELEGANCE AND
MACHISMO, NINA GRISCOM'S HORSE-COUNTRY
HOME BLENDS AFRICAN ELEMENTS,
A SILVERY PALETTE, AND ECHOES OF THE LATE, GREAT BILL BLASS

*Text by Mitchell Owens · Photography by William Waldron
Produced by Cynthia Frank*

If Ernest Hemingway were still around, Nina Griscom would likely inspire more than a few short stories. With her tawny good looks, bon vivant attitude, and leonine purr, all this former model and current tastemaker needs to be one of Papa's heroines is a shotgun in the crook of her arm and a safari jacket.

Griscom's larger-than-life allure and refined beauty made her one of fashion designer Bill Blass's main muses, and the two became fast friends. While he was drawn to her no-nonsense demeanor and salty humor, she appreciated his manly elegance. She also admired his impeccable decorating style, with his passion for Roman antiquities and uncluttered rooms dressed in brown and white. "Bill was a big mentor," says Griscom, now the proprietor of an eponymous Upper East Side home-furnishings shop known for chic accessories of leather, horn, shell, and coral and charming telephone tables covered in everything from shagreen to African-bullfrog skin. "But when it came to doing a house for myself, I had to be me rather than do Bill Blass on a budget. He

could afford those ancient statues; I can't. And I'm not into neoclassicism."

That's not to say the legendary couturier's influence is entirely absent from the country house where she, her husband, real-estate broker Leonel Piraino, and her 16-year-old daughter, Lily Baker, spend weekends. Located on 15 wooded acres in Millbrook, New York—a horsey village about a two-hour drive from the newlyweds' townhouse in Manhattan—the home possesses an unmistakably Blassian swagger and restraint, its grandly proportioned rooms outfitted with neutral colors and not too much furniture. However, as a connoisseur of top-flight Regency treasures, Blass might have taken issue with Griscom's armchair of artificial moose antlers or the humble folding park chairs gathered beneath a bodaciously bristly twig chandelier that seems to be one part Adirondack lodge and two parts Tim Burton.

"I am a grazer with great purpose," Griscom answers when asked to define her freewheeling but



low-key style. A devotee of rough-and-tumble flea markets and earthy accoutrements often gathered on the fly—she braves for sculptural examples of fungi growing on tree trunks, which her husband then gingerly removes—she is creatively cost-conscious too. When the couple's living room seemed to cry out for a large and impressive work of art, Griscom had a photo lab snap a picture of a Flemish Baroque drawing she owns (a 1670 study of a gnarled tree by artist Jan Siberechts) and blow it up to poster size. It now hangs above a rustic French console Griscom's mother gave her when she was 19, not far from ceiling-high stalks of yucca propped into a corner like giant pickup sticks.

"I'm more into shape, form, and texture than I am about what the item is worth or where it came from," she says. "I'm not a provenance snob. Beauty is beauty, and ugly things can be beautiful too." Ditto uncomfortable objects. In the spacious living room,

one of the most striking pieces of furniture is also utterly unforgiving—a circa-1950 chaise longue whose pitch is as cruel as its wood slats are punishing. "I wouldn't let my worst enemy sit on that," Griscom says of the well-weathered seat, laughing. "But it looks good." Especially when placed next to a round mahogany pedestal table made by her friend Robert Lighton.

Combinations like that take practice, because what's appealingly eclectic when handled by some people can be just plain dissonant when arranged by less skillful types. But it is the uncomplicated character of Griscom's belongings—worn woods, plain metals, ebony-dark finishes, blached fabrics—that keeps the visual flow unruffled and the juxtapositions potent yet palatable. Most of the house's walls are painted a silvery gray that recalls the stony palettes of one of her idols, Belgian dealer-designer Axel Vervoordt. When it came time to decorate a library for



Nineteenth-century staircase models (one was a gift from Bill Blass, the other was purchased at auction) are displayed on a table by Robert Lighton; the 1950s chaise longue is from Amy Perlin Antiques. Facing page: Nina Griscom and Leonel Piraino in their living room. See Resources.







Clockwise from far left: A pair of 19th-century English garden urns in the dining room; the chandelier is from Hudson Home, the chairs were found at a French flea market, and the sea-grass rug is from ABC Carpet & Home. In the living room, an enlargement of *A Study of an Old Gnarled Tree* by Jan Siberechts hangs above an antique console, and yucca stalks are clustered in the corner. The dining room table is set with pewter flatware by Match and antique plates; the hexagonal glasses and silver- and ram's-horn candleholders are from Nina Griscom. See Resources.



Clockwise from top left: A bistro table from Schorr & Dobinsky in the downstairs hallway showcases turtle shells from Amy Perlin Antiques; the Dogon grain ladder is from Nina Griscom. French metal bookcases from Nina Griscom and a sculpture of rake tines in the rear hallway; the pedestal is from BoBo Intriguing Objects, the window-seat pillows and cushions are covered in an Andrew Martin fabric, and the rug is from Restoration Hardware. The living room's iron-and-wood étagères display African shields, vintage wood school tablets, and Griscom's collection of local fungi. See Resources.





In the master bedroom, the bed is upholstered in a Rose Tarlow-Melrose House fabric; the fur throw is from Nina Griscom, the wallpaper is by Nina Campbell from Osborne & Little, and the stools are by Garrison Rousseau. Facing page, from top: The library's tobacco-leaf wall covering and parchment-and-bronze desk are by Garrison Rousseau, and the pillows are covered in Timbuktu fabric by Andrew Martin; an antique box from Nina Griscom sits atop an heirloom table. The guest beds are by Robert Lighton; the wall color is Peony by Ralph Lauren Paint. See Resources.





her Argentina-born husband, however, Griscom had the walls inventively clad in a textured covering made of dried tobacco leaves applied by hand to wood panels. The effect is somewhere between tortoiseshell lacquer and distressed leather. The roughness of the wall treatment is the perfect foil for sophisticated furnishings such as a parchment-and-bronze desk by Garrison Rousseau and an 1860s low table that belonged to Griscom's maternal grandmother. "You can't chuck out all the brown furniture," she explains with a shrug, referring to traditional antiques.

Though the interiors of the Griscom-Piraino house appear peaceful, don't let the serenity fool you. Furniture is constantly shifted, and tablescapes get rearranged regularly. The iron *étagères* in the living room serve as cabinets of curiosities and are loaded, unloaded, and reloaded with all manner of engaging acquisitions: fossils, baskets, a fragment of a marble statue, bits of Piraino-harvested fungi. "This place is a journey, not a project," Griscom says. "It's never going to be finished. And I like that." ■

